

The same explosive attitude again

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Comment

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AT the Strasbourg Town Hall meeting in France in April, United States President Barack Obama declared his intention to "seek the goal of a world without nuclear weapons".

Contrary to proclamations and pledges over the years since America dropped that bomb over Hiroshima on Aug 6, 1945, what we see today is the converse: nuclear proliferation and armament instead.



The 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty pledges that the nuclear powers work towards "general and complete disarmament" and, in exchange, other signatory states pledge not to pursue nuclear-weapons capability.

Until today, the outcome remains elusive, although the two major nuclear nations, America and Russia, have reduced their nuclear arsenal from the Cold War days to about half today.

The achievements are clearly unconvincing, with other countries still wanting to join the nuclear race.

Since then, at least three countries have tested nuclear devices openly, others clandestinely.

The ones that are not friendly to the nuclear power nations are called "rogue" states and are pressured to cease immediately, while the friendly ones get support or are left to their own devices.

The latest, perhaps, is the open endorsement of the US vice-president last month of Israel's sovereign right to decide what is in its best interest in dealing with Iran's nuclear ambitions, whether the US agrees or not.

"We cannot dictate to another sovereign nation what they can and cannot do when they make a determination if they make a determination that they're existentially threatened," Joe Biden was quoted as saying.

Israel's deputy foreign minister echoed this, acknowledging: "The US, like Israel ... has determined unequivocally that Iran must not have nuclear military capability".

This is despite Biden being the highest-ranking US administration official to caution the Jewish state last April against a military strike when he was asked whether he was concerned that the new government of Israel might strike Iranian nuclear facilities.

In fact, months later, he even admitted that "Israel will have to reconcile itself with the nuclearisation of Iran", a view which a leading newspaper in Israel regarded as "breathtakingly stupid".

Stupid or not, Biden has long been considered strongly pro-Israel, and in a widely quoted interview last year said: "I am a Zionist. You don't have to be a Jew to be a Zionist."

So when Obama later stepped in to clarify the White House stance on the issue in stark contrast to what Biden had said, it becomes a purely academic exercise.

Obama's ambitious Strasbourg pronouncement is devalued as just rhetoric for a "feel-good" presidency.

The ambivalent position taken mirrors very much what happened in Hiroshima on that fateful day in August 64 years ago, and three days later in Nagasaki.

The US and the Allied forces justified the heinous action of razing the two cities with the atomic bombs with the same reasoning.

That is, they determine what is in their interest to do to Japan and anyone else.

Today, it is the turn of other nations that are not the allies of the US. A case in point is Iraq.

Only much later was it learnt that it did not have the much-touted weapon of mass destruction.

So, as we reflect on the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we also need to reflect on the moral values of realising a nuclear-free world as called for by Obama.

When we talk about global nuclear disarmament, we should look at the fate of humanity as a whole and not at a limited sovereign interest in a hypocritical way.

Even then, the main beneficiary of the nuclear-free world would still be the US, which would be "the supreme conventional military power".

The US would enjoy extraordinary strategic advantages in the post-nuclear environment as its conventional forces of land, air and seas would be free to operate globally without the risk of nuclear attack.

What it means, therefore, is that we should not stop at just nuclear weapons but all weapons of war befitting a civilised world that we claim to be part of.

However, in the contest between his presumed moral authority and the reality of global power politics, many would put their money on the latter based on what history often tells us. But we often fail to learn from history.

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